

Quelque [?] [?]

A
L E T T E R
O N

Parliamentary Representation,

IN WHICH

THE PROPRIETY OF
TRIENIAL AND SEPTENNIAL
PARLIAMENTS IS CONSIDERED.

INSCRIBED TO

JOHN SINCLAIR, Esq. M. P.

" In Pride, in reasoning Pride, our Error lies,
" All quit their Sphere, and rush into the Skies;
" Pride still is aiming at the blest Abodes;
" Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods,
" Cease then; nor Order Imperfection name,
" Our proper Bliss depends on what we blame."

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LETTER, &c.

S I R,

THERE is an air of candour in the short hints you have submitted to the public, that cannot but recommend them to the notice of candid men. You seem aware of all the difficulties that embarrass the question of equal representation; and the plan you propose seems rather a compromise than a perfect system in your own conception of it. As such it is not to be objected to it, that it is imperfect. I am persuaded every proposal that can take place upon the subject, will be liable to the same objection. My objection to your plan is, that it admits the principle of *equal representation*; which I think is foreign to the British Constitution, and utterly inapplicable to it; at the same time that you make a partial use of it, giving it an effect in the apportionment of Boroughs,

which

which you do not think necessary in the addition to County Members—in short, that you establish a line which you neither do nor can abide by in the detail of your reformation. A reformation which would, in my poor opinion, be then consistent only if you were to apply it to another rule or principle, that of opposing the Influence of the Crown, instead of an attempt to equalize the representation. It is of no moment to the argument I use from whence it comes—I will only say it comes from one full of personal respect for your character, without having the honour to be known to you. From one, who, though by no means indifferent to the opinion of the public, is never discouraged by popular prejudice from deserving their esteem, by consistently taking that path to which truth and sincerity directs him. Whether he has an interest in the question or otherwise, he trusts and believes will make no difference in his judgment. His opinions are not taken up lightly or hastily—he does not wish to deceive others; if he is himself deceived, he will take correction with thankfulness, and if convinced, will as cheerfully retract his errors, as he now boldly presumes to assert his present opinions.

So much for the person who takes the liberty to trouble you with this public address. I will now, with your permission, proceed to lay before you such thoughts as YOUR Pamphlet has naturally suggested

suggested to my mind. The attention of Parliament has been called lately to this great consideration; and though they have decided against any general committee, which in fact would be submitting the Constitution of one branch of the Legislature to the judgment of a very few Members to be new modelled pretty much at their discretion, yet they have not declared against receiving any specific proposition. You are a Member of the House of Commons; your plan may become a subject of their discussion: the attention of the public is awakened to it, and that public therefore have a right to express their opinion of it.

You say, Sir, very truly, that "the great object of all constitutional propositions at this time is to strengthen the liberties of the people, by reducing the Influence of the Crown." Upon this great object we are all agreed. The question is then only as to the expediency of such measures as will the best promote that end, without producing inconveniences which will more than overbalance the benefit of such reforms. Plans of œconomy come recommended to us under every advantage. Whilst they tend to relieve the public of the heavy burthen we are labouring under, they alone effectually stop the sources of that influence which affects not only the independence of Members of Parliament in both Houses, but which

spreads itself through the great arteries to the minutest blood-vessel through the kingdom. It is a principle that stands in need of no argument but experience, that Influence will, in most cases, be proportioned to the extent of property. The man who spends 10,000*l.* per annum will ordinarily have twice the influence in his country, that one will have who spends only five. King James, whose annual revenues did not amount to above 1,300,000*l.* at the Revolution, had exactly an influence proportionably less than his present Majesty, or rather than the present Servants of the Crown, whose expenditure in the course of last year, exclusive of the favour arising from the distribution of the loan, amounted to near 14,000,000*l.* Every retrenchment therefore of the public expenditure is not more evidently a saving to the public purse, than it is a defalcation of so much of the Influence of the Crown.

The frequency of Elections, at the first glance so plausible, is but an appeal to the people; and experience has lately shewn us, that there is some cause without doors that operates over the mass of the people in the same manner as it does over their Representatives. Look over the Lists of the last General Election for Knights of the Shire, and compare the acquisition we have got to the cause of Freedom by the new Returns, you will find
yourself

yourself obliged to own you have little to hope from the frequency of such appeals ; whilst the evils that you very properly point out as the certain consequence of such a measure, would greatly over-balance a much less doubtful benefit. I will add, as matter of opinion at least, that if there were one method more effectual than another to drive out of the House of Commons every sober, disinterested, and independent member, it would be the expence, vexation, and disgust, of frequent elections, which would end in deciding the contest in favour of those only who meant to make a priot of their perseverance ; it tends only, as was lately said by an able Member of Parliament, to weaken the hands of Ministers *where they should be strong*, and to strengthen them *where they should be weak*.

We now come to the third expedient “ that of “ rendering the representation of the people more “ complete.” And here permit me to observe, that I can annex no idea to the words so connected of *complete representation*, but that of *equal representation*. As your plan opens, Sir, that idea seems to be develloped : for though you disclaim wisely the trying upon the British Constitution such an experiment as a reformation, “ by which every “ individual might boast of having a real, not a “ virtual representative in Parliament,” yet, Sir, the scale by which you propose to reduce the
number

number of representatives for boroughs, being in proportion to the number of electors in each borough, it is obvious, that the principle of equal representation is the only one applied to that reform. Now, Sir, if that principle is to be applied to boroughs (where I shall hope to prove to you it ought the least to be applied, upon any arguments either of theory or experience) how much stronger does it apply to the representation of counties, with regard to which you have totally abandoned all such principle? The privilege of sending members to Parliament, conferred at different times upon cities and boroughs, can never be considered but as local privileges upon the same footing with other privileges and immunities, which were varied in their circumstances at the good pleasure of the Prince who granted them. There were charters, therefore, of different dates and descriptions; some comprehending more, some fewer of the inhabitants; some franchises attached to residence, some to local property; some extended the right of voting to the inhabitants at large, some confining it as a special privilege to corporations only. In an institution so various in its circumstances, confined to no number of boroughs, limited neither to the situation, importance, nor the populousness of the places who were distinguished by the prerogative, how was it possible *then* (much less

less at this time of day) to have applied the principle of equal representation? Had such been the principle of that part of the representation, the inhabitants of all cities, towns, and incorporated villages, should have been numbered, apportioned and established; and members assigned to them in the degree they merited, for whom every inhabitant in such town or district should have had the privilege of voting. Nothing like it was the case. No proportion, no uniform rule whatever was observed. As little regard was had to the general proportion of such Burgesses to the number of Knights of the Shire; for though in old times they also have varied from four to three and two in each county, yet the Burgesses were increased from time to time at the pleasure of the reigning Monarch, by assigning that privilege to new places, from the reign of Hen. III. to Char. II. whilst in other places it grew obsolete, or was considered as a burthen, from which, at their desire, they were released.

So much then for the principle of equal representations with regard to Burgesses, as the principle of their institution; it is evident none can have been more foreign to it. It neither can be applied to the proportion they bore to the community at large, nor to the representatives of counties; for it never was a fixed proportion at all; as little was it an equal representation of that species of interest,

terest, or even of the particular town itself, since the privilege was granted gratuitously, perhaps capriciously, to places of more or less importance, and under circumstances which often deprived by far the majority of the inhabitants of the place itself from partaking of it.

Now, Sir, if the nature of the institution of boroughs precludes all ideas of equal representation, to which, in your plan of reformation, you have endeavoured to apply it, let us see, Sir, how far it was applied originally to the representatives of counties, or how far it is now applicable to them; for there surely, if any where, we should expect to find the principle of equal representation.

In what manner the Knights of the Shire were originally elected does not appear. We know that under the feudal system that prevailed in the reign of Hen. III. when representatives were first summoned to Parliament, by much the greater part of the inhabitants of the island were so far from enjoying any privilege that could entitle them to vote for representatives, that they were considered as little more than the cattle of the farm. The dawn of general liberty and its true principles had not yet broke in upon us. If it was at that time a representation of all the *liberi homines* in the country, is was still confined to a very small part of the inhabitants, who, *as men*, are now considered

considered to be invested with the same natural inherent rights of civil freedom. Be it as may, we know, however, that the number of voters limited, as it certainly still was in the reign of Hen. VI. was sufficient to produce great inconvenience; so that upon petition, in the year 1342, the restriction of the right of voting to freeholds of forty shillings value took place by act of Parliament, which states, "That whereas Knights
 " of the Shire had of late been chosen by *outra-*
 " *geous* and *excessive* numbers of people, and of
 " *small substance*, for the future, the said Knights
 " shall be elected in every county by people
 " dwelling and resident in the said counties,
 " whereof every one shall have in lands or tene-
 " ments to the value of forty shillings by the year
 " at least," &c.

I need not observe to you, Sir, what proportion forty shillings at that time bore to the present value of money, when, near that period, wheat *was so dear*, as to sell at sixteen shillings per quarter, having sold in 1422 for eight, malt at five, and so for all the necessaries of life in proportion. Here, Sir, is a formal disclaiming by Parliament of the principle contended for. An election by outrageous and excessive numbers is stated as a grievance—*small property* objected to as an incapacity—and the privilege restrained among the few to the still fewer, who had a freehold property in
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land, amounting to what would be now called a very substantial yeoman.

This act still remains in force, though the restriction in it by the alteration of money is now extended under it to a number, that would certainly in those days have been deemed *outrageous* and *excessive*. We do not find, however, that this restriction was then treated as a new principle, or such as overturned the line of the constitution; and it has been now acquiesced in for between three and four centuries. But this does not seem to have been the only innovation of this act—it restrains the right of voting to such forty shilling freeholders only, as shall be “dwelling and resident in the said counties:” so that if in the beginning each county had two or more representatives, they were elected, as it should seem, by all the electors at large; whereas by this act, the representative of each county could be chosen only by the freeholders of their respective county; a restraint evidently suggested by necessity, to prevent disorder and confusion. Systems of government are seldom dictated by philosophy upon speculative and abstract reasonings. Necessity which first united mankind in societies, points out to them, from time to time, those establishments which they think likely to contribute to their prosperity. Present inconvenience gives birth to immediate remedy; which often producing unlook-
ed-for

ed-for inconvenience, calls for new remedies in its turn; and thus systems are formed and changed *ad infinitum*. It is with political institutions as it is with language; chance, inconvenience, and circumstance, are the inventors of both; grammar and theory are formed from the contemplation of them, but are seldom or never the parents of either. In both cases the exceptions are almost as numerous as the rules; and they both attain their end, whatever philosophers may think of them, if by the one we make ourselves understood, and by the other enjoy the benefits of good government. Now, Sir, as far as theory seems to justify us in the representation of counties, it goes no further than that a certain number of knights should be chosen by substantial freeholders to sit in Parliament, and some rule being to be laid down to ascertain the number, the counties were thought to be as good a rule to determine the number of knights as any other; and, perhaps, without entering into the niceties of proportion, they could hardly have hit upon a better plan for every practicable purpose.

But, Sir, if Simon de Montfort had been a philosopher, and had attended to the rules of apportionment, nothing, indeed, would have been less adequate to his purpose than such an arrangement. The number of inhabitants must have been first ascertained throughout the kingdom; it must,

without regard to counties, have been thrown into equal districts according to the number of intended representatives; and every one, if possible, ought to have had his voice in electing for that district. If the districts could not have been exactly apportioned, if it were not possible that every man should enjoy his franchise, or that the prejudices of the times would not admit of so liberal an extension, it should have been brought as near as possible to that perfect representation; but when the counties of Rutland and York were considered of equal importance, what shadow could there have been of equality in representation?

But whatever might have been the *original* institution of the House of Commons, are we so bound, it is said, to antient forms, that we are not at liberty to adopt a new principle if we please, and at this time of day, when our minds are more enlightened, to new model our constitution, and to make a more perfect system of representation? Certainly: if we think the work practicable in the first place; and if we think the alteration will be really of sufficient advantage to repay the inconveniences of innovation in the next place. To apply the old trite allusion to the present question—Were you to inherit an old Gothic structure, venerable from its antiquity, which had proved its strength and its utility through successive ages; though it were defective in regularity, having been built upon no plan, but having received additions from time to time,

time, as the circumstances of your ancestors, their convenience, or their necessities, had required, would you be tempted to destroy it merely because the casual traveller in passing by, observed that the door was not in the centre; that there were more windows on the one side than the other; that one tower was square and the other round? Perhaps you would say, that a new Palladian mansion would please you better, and that you would indulge your fancy in a perfect specimen of architecture that should defy criticism, at whatever cost or trouble. This, Sir, would be a consideration with you: but if either the expence, or trouble, or the doubt whether you should at last be better lodged in the new than in the old mansion, should discourage you from so great an undertaking, what would be your second consideration? Not whether you would pull down, but whether you would new model the Gothic edifice. Should you by such superficial criticism, be induced to this middle plan, what a work would you have undertaken!—the forcing the genius of the place to modern rules, widening apertures, pulling away buttresses, symetrising things dissimilar, in short, *mutando quadrotam rotundis*!—What would be at last the effect of all your labours? The endangering, perhaps, the strength, certainly sacrificing the convenience of your habitation. You would have given it an aukward though regular appearance, uniformity without beauty, and an effect which would,

at much cost, and with many sacrifices, be more disgusting to the eye of true taste, than its antient towers, spires, and battlements, however useless or irregular.

Now, Sir, though I neither say in the instance of the Gothic structure, nor in the Gothic constitution, that no alteration may be made advantageously, provided it be kept with the genius of its constitution; yet I say, that in both instances, the application of a new principle by which it shall change the genius of its institution, will be a vain and fruitless attempt; by which we shall take great pains to a bad purpose, whilst we run the risque of endangering the foundation. No, Sir, if we must indulge ourselves in modern ideas, we must build from the foundation a modern structure, and take our chance when we have done for the beauty and convenience of it.

If then we are to build upon a new foundation, and that foundation be the principle of equal representation, let us examine whether such a plan is in any degree, at least in any satisfactory degree, possible; for it is not every plausible theory that is capable of being carried into execution. We must begin with considering that there are two interests of pretty near equal importance to be represented: the one the interest of landed property, which includes as well the tiller of the soil as the owner of it; the other the commercial interest,

interest, by which not only the product is converted into money, and the industry of those hands employed which are superfluous, to the purposes of agriculture ; but by which the wealth and industry of foreign nations are appropriated to us, our public revenues in a great measure supported, our naval strength supplied with seamen, and, in short, on which the sinews of peace and war principally depend. Suppose the population to amount to any given sum, no matter what, we will say at the very lowest computation 6,000,000, out of which at least 4,000,000 are women and children ; though in that instance we are obliged to have recourse to virtual representation. I will then divide the 2,000,000 by 5,000, which are to the full as many as can be supposed with propriety to give their suffrages in favour of a representative ; we shall thus have a representation of the landed property of 400 Knights, and this at the lowest computation. Now, though for many reasons the landed property ought to have the turn of the scale in its favour, yet, I believe, nobody will dispute with me, but that the *value* of the commercial property so far exceeds the value of the land, that it is entitled at least to an equal share in the representation ; which would bring the total of the House of Commons to 800 ; probably, if the real numeration of the inhabitants of the island could be taken, it would not amount

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in this proportion, altogether to so little as 1000. But if the number of the total should be no objection to the plan, and it could be reduced as low as 600, which is nearly the state of our present House of Commons, let us see in what manner we shall be able to distribute upon our great principle, the half which we allot to the commercial interest. Now, in this view, all small towns and little corporations, unless you could bundle a score or two of them together, are quite out of the question: even cities, as we call them, unless we sent representatives for Bishops, would *as such* have little claim to that privilege. Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow, would certainly have the preference over most of the cities who have the residence of a Bishop, which, I believe, with us constitutes that distinction. But what share would you allot to the great metropolis? Would two-thirds be too great a proportion? Half I conclude, would be too little. The Bank; the great trading companies. The East-India Company alone, who contributes so largely to your revenue, and whose possessions in one of the richest countries in the world, extend over a territory that would put to shame half the Princes in Europe.—Fifty representatives for that body would not be adequate to their importance. To state, however, these apportionments with any degree of accuracy, would require

require a knowledge of circumstances infinitely beyond what I possess. With perfect precision I suppose nobody conceives they could be stated; if any man thinks they could be adjusted with any tolerable degree of seeming impartiality, I shall be ready to give him my attention; though in the mean time I must confess, I cannot well conceive a more arduous and laborious undertaking. So much for the difficulties of forming a constitution *ab initio* upon this wide principle, in such an empire as this. I need not say how much they would be increased if such an attempt was to be made here at this time, where the pulling down the old edifice would be at least attended with as many obstacles as would obstruct the building it a new. But it is needless for me to do more than just hint at the discouragement towards a plan, that I am persuaded none but the wildest and the boldest visionary ever seriously thought of undertaking.

Why then, you will say, combat a shadow? Nobody thinks of carrying the principle of equal representation to its extent, because we all see it is impracticable. We propose only to apply it in certain instances, and to carry it as far as in reason and prudence it is practicable, by way of amelioration to the present system: let us hear your objections to the principle in that degree. I answer, that if the principle is such as could

scarce possibly be applied to an original plan of Government, and certainly cannot be attempted as a reformation upon any idea of consistent impartiality; if it is such a principle as never has in any country of extent yet prevailed to have its full effect, and there is the greatest reason to believe it never can; have we not grounds to suspect that the principle itself is unreasonable, and such as ought totally to be abandoned. I do not say that no reforms in the actual state of representation may be expedient; but I suspect that every reform that avows this celebrated principle as its object, will be ridiculous in theory, from falling so far short of the principle it admits; whilst in practice it may very probably be mischievous in its effects by shocking some other, which may be the real principle of the Constitution; and which can only be ascertained by an intimate knowledge of causes and effects. The man who laid the last stone upon the Tower of Babel, certainly flattered himself he was nearer Heaven than when he laid the foundation stone at the bottom; yet so far was he from attaining the object of his undertaking by so inconsiderable an advance towards it, that nothing but infatuation could have suggested the attempt to his understanding. As much of equality in representation as is necessary for any useful and practical purpose, certainly exists in the present mode of election for Knights

of the Shire. If any man prefers for good reasons that mode of election to any other, and thinks that an augmentation of that class of representatives might be desirable, perhaps I may agree with him, as far as such moderate augmentation may consist with the forms and business of Parliament; but observe, it is upon no idea of apportionment that I should consent to such a reform. It is not to balance between the landed and commercial interest; between the importance of Yorkshire and Rutlandshire; between the number of inhabitants and the present number of electors, that I should adopt such a reform; but simply, because I think that such an addition of gentlemen chosen in their counties, men of considerable landed property or importance; in short, men of their description would be a valuable acquisition to the House of Commons; and it is for that reason, that the plan of the late Earl of Chatham, of adding one more Knight of the Shire to every county in England, with a proportionable addition to Scotland, to keep up the bargain of the Union, would be the best mode and measure of such augmentation, precisely, because it introduces no new principle, or other innovation whatsoever.

But, Sir, as so small an augmentation does not seem to satisfy your idea, or that of the writer's upon the subject, you are obliged, in order to

introduce the number you require, to rescind a proportionable number of Burgeſſes, that the total may not become too unweildy. Hence ariſes the difficulty, and the neceſſity of holding forth ſome principle to direct, if not to juſtify, the intended amputation. For want of other principle then, you are obliged to have recourſe to that of equality, which leaſt of any one can or ought to be applied to that part of our representation. You exhibit upon this principle a table of calculation, ſtating the ſuppoſed number of voters in each borough, from ſuch materials as lay before you, and which are certainly accurate enough to convey your principle, however erroneous they may be in reality, upon a ſcrutiny. Then taking for granted, that equality in representation is the line of our Conſtitution, that that equality is beſt aſcertained where there are the greateſt number of voters, you boldly ſtrike off fifteen boroughs, where there are the feweſt voters, and half the representation of thoſe, who offer themſelves in the claſs, the neareſt to the fifteen reſcinded.

Now, if I could in my conſcience believe, that ſuch a violence done to the intereſt of individuals were either neceſſary or expedient to any good practical purpoſe, I might endeavour to perſuade myſelf to adopt this line as a caſe of extremity, however little I might think it founded in the
antient

antient Constitution. But if I am convinced that such a measure, besides, that it admits a broad and general principle which threatens to throw every thing into confusion, and cannot possibly be carried into effect, in its full extent, if it were never so desirable; if, I say, added to this heavy objection to it, I should be of opinion, that such an amputation would exactly leave the most exceptionable boroughs, and take away, in many instances, those that are the fortresses against the influence of the Crown; under what possible inducement can I acquiesce in such an innovation? It would be, in my opinion, a rash and wanton violence, upon a false principle, and operating exactly against the bias you wish to give to the House of Commons. I am sure I have too much respect for the candour, and the moderation of the work before me, to allow me to treat it ludicrously; but to state the proposal as it appears to me, will you not be offended with the following allusion?

Suppose a Philosopher in his closet, who has been deep in the contemplation of the abstract attributes of the Deity, should resolve that a partial dispensation was totally inconsistent with the goodness and justice of the Supreme Being; that from those principles he should assume that it must have been his original intention to have made all his creatures equal, though by lapse of
time,

time, and the degeneracy of all sublunary things, the apparent inequality had been produced, that puts so wide a difference between a mouse and an elephant. Suppose, in order to re-establish what he conceives to be the principle of creation, in a degree at least, though he despairs of carrying it to its primitive perfection, he should propose to exterminate fifteen races of animals from the face of the earth, that, according to his data, were the most degenerate, that is, the farthest removed from the elephant; and then to do what he could towards increasing the bulk of the others—what would you say to him? Would you not tell him that the difference which still remained between the sheep and the elephant, was sufficient to laugh *him* to scorn; and that *his principle* having mistaken the intention and object of animal creation, by a false *argumentum à priori*, he had proposed an unnecessary and wanton act of cruelty and oppression: whereas, had he seized the right clue and the right principle, he would have substituted that of dependence and subordination to that of equality, and would have been content to leave things pretty much as he found them. He would not, however, have been precluded from multiplying such races of animals as were found to be the most useful to mankind, or from endeavouring to destroy such as were by experience found to be themselves the most noxious and destructive.

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Let us then abandon once for all the principle of equal representation, and assume instead of it, the principle which is too often confounded with it, as if they were one and the same thing, that of the independence of Parliament *upon the influence of the Crown*. I will not say any thing of the constitution of the other House; but as to the House of Commons, if it means any thing, it means to be a check, a counterpoise to the influence of the Crown. This is the true principle; it is that which you set out with, and it is the only one we never should lose sight of in any objects of parliamentary reform. It is clear in theory; it is safe in practice: and we need never fear the carrying it to any excess in its extent, except such only where it militates with itself.

Now, Sir, if you should tell me that the two principles are so connected, that they are inseparable; that equal or popular representation is always on the side of independence, and the elections by a small number of voters in the scale of prerogative, how shall I answer you but by appealing to experience. The Knights of the Shires stand foremost certainly in the rank of independence, if property and character, and an attention to the sentiments of their numerous constituents, ought to imply independence; yet of all
those

those Knights of the Shires, who voted that the influence of the Crown ought to be reduced, which they had universally supported, and afterwards opposed every measure that tended towards the reduction of that influence, at the close of the last Parliament, how few were rejected by their counties for that or any part of their political conduct. You will say then that their conduct was approved by their constituents, who did not wish the reduction of the influence of the Crown; what then will be the excuse of those counties who returned the same members in so many instances, one of whom had always supported and the other opposed that influence? Surely those constituents could not have held two contrary political opinions, or have equally approved of the opposite conduct of their representatives. Such is the appeal to the political sentiments of the most numerous and respectable part of our representation. The cities and great towns stand by themselves, nobody wishing to interfere with them. The other boroughs may be thrown into three classes: those where there is a popular election, such as house-keepers not receiving alms, &c. the right of election in a corporation only, to the exclusion of the rest of the inhabitants, and the burgage tenures. The two last are more frequently what are called family boroughs, being generally more or less under

under the influence of some neighbouring gentlemen or noblemen, in some few instances under their command: the first is under no influence or command whatever, and being extended to every inhabitant not receiving alms, approaches the nearest to that mode of representation that is the most in fashion. In these open and uninfluenced boroughs, you would, according to theory, expect to find the purest and most perfect specimen of representation. Every candidate who offers for their favour stands upon equal advantage, and the merits alone of each individual must be supposed to determine the free choice of the electors. I need not tell you what those merits generally are, or in what manner such elections are commonly decided. These are the rotten boroughs of the constitution in the most eminent degree, and the sure refuge for every pilferer and betrayer of his trust, who brings home sufficient fruits of his speculation to purchase security for his malversations. These, Sir, if any franchise must be taken away, seem to be the most obnoxious, whatever be the numbers of voters or inhabitants amongst them; unless indeed it were possible to single out such as are called Government boroughs, like that which a late Secretary to the Treasury boldly called, upon his legs the other day, a Treasury borough. As to those, who, though their franchise be con-

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fin'd to a small number of voters, are more or less under the influence of men of property, if I am to speak the truth, I have no great apprehensions from them. It is to them we owe the first production of the talents of the late Lord Chatham, and that son who promises to emulate his father's fame, as he already does his eloquence; Mr. Fox, Mr. Burke, Mr. Barré, Mr. Dunning, and, in short, almost all the characters the most eminently distinguished for abilities and public spirit.

Let us recollect, that when Mr. Burke was at the last general election rejected by one of the first cities in England, whose favour he had merited by a thousand titles; when the man who had been so recently thanked and flattered for his labours in the Senate by counties and the most respectable bodies, found himself excluded from any seat, at the general return of members to the present parliament, it was to one of these *influenced* boroughs, and to the private friendship and recommendation of one not more exalted in his situation than in the independence of his mind, that we owe his assistance at present in the House of Commons. It is to these boroughs, in a great measure, that we owe the steady and consistent support that has brought about at last that revolution in measures, which, except in some few instances, was not dictated by instructions from counties, or the efforts of populous cities,
but

but which was constantly urged by a persevering and disinterested spirit within doors, by men who thought themselves secure in those seats, where they and their ancestors had a sort of hereditary tenure for themselves, or for the friends whom they recommended. Believe me, Sir, could the Crown once get rid of that influence in the House of Commons that gives consistency and firmness to the spirit of independence; could the Crown, instead of it, throw every thing into frequent, fluctuating, unbiaſſed, popular elections, there would soon be an end of the contest, and the only permanent influence in the country, that of the Crown, would drive every thing before it.

Upon the whole, permit me to observe, that it seems as if our principal mistake was in supposing that an alteration in the mode of election will alter the hearts of the electors or the elected. We have seen county members, under the influence of contracts, voting for the Court, and repeatedly returned, whilst members for the most exceptionable boroughs have been in the opposite scale. Let us not divert our attention from its true object, which is reducing the influence of the Crown within doors and without. You have already bills for excluding contractors from sitting in Parliament, and revenue officers from voting at elections: you have abolished many of those useless offices that have hung so long a

weight upon the independence of both Houses. Other plans of reform, short of new principles and new constitutions, may be thought of and brought forward—let us try a little the effect of these remedies, before we proceed to more violent ones; and if at last we think it necessary to make some change in the representation, let the first experiment we make be to avail ourselves of that expedient which the late Lord Chatham has left us as a legacy, the fruits of so much experience, knowledge, and reflection, which he determined upon, after mature deliberation, to be the greatest good with the least evil. The pouring young blood into a constitution, it was in vain to think of renovating; the applying buttresses to that venerable fabric, whose defects were too intimately connected with its excellencies to admit of an attempt to modernize it without endangering its safety; I need not say I mean the adding one more representative to every county in England, without disturbing what has at least the sanction of antiquity and long possession, and what, with all its imperfections, has been effectual under his administration to carry this nation to the highest pitch of glory, whilst it has, through ages, preserved our free and happy Constitution, the envy of all Europe, and the admiration of every one who has held it in contemplation.

And

And now, Sir, before I conclude, give me leave to warn you, from the best of all authorities, the authority of recent and of bitter experience, against the danger of applying abstract and speculative principles to Government. When a writer is endeavouring to combat the slavish prejudices, by which all the liberties of mankind are surrendered into the hands of a tyrant, who conceives his subject is made for him, not his appointment ordained for the welfare of his subject, there is a necessity of reverting to the first principles of all government. Despotism is founded upon maxims as wicked as they are absurd, and reason as well as force cannot be urged too strongly to overturn so monstrous an infatuation. But when things are settled in an established order, under an institution that has long been the envy of all Europe, how dangerous is it to bring forward these abstract reasonings, and to apply them to practical legislation. At the time the Stamp-Act was first proposed to Parliament, there was, I think, but one person in the House of Commons who expressed a doubt concerning the authority of Great-Britain over her colonies. When the right of taxing America came afterwards into discussion, it was necessary to find some line of distinction by which that right could be discriminated from every other exercise of legislation, which was universally acknowledged, and which
nobody

nobody seemed at that time in the intention of disputing. It was therefore contended, that a people were slaves, whose *purse* could be disposed of without their own consent given immediately by themselves, or those whom they deputed as their representatives in Parliament: That America sent no members to the British House of Commons; therefore the taxing them was an act of tyranny, incompatible with the first principle of a free Constitution, that of representation. In vain was it contended on the other hand, that all the subjects of the British Crown were represented *virtually*, and that far the greatest part of the island of Great-Britain were no otherwise represented in Parliament:—it was still insisted upon, that *actual* representation alone could imply such a consent of the people as could authorize a free Government to any right over their purse. Thus did the very respectable champions for American liberty, at that time, establish the broad principle, that America was not represented in the House of Commons of Great-Britain. What then! did they mean to extend it to the exempting North-America from the whole of the legislation of the British Parliament, to the total independence of America? Nothing like it; they flattered themselves they could restrain the application of the principle to one object only, the right of *internal taxation*. Whether they were deceived in that expectation

expectation we are not now to learn. America could not be so blind to the necessary consequences of such premises, as not to see, that if she was not represented in Parliament, and that representation alone could give a right of legislation in one instance, the right must stand upon the same ground in every other. It was in vain to plead to them, that there was something more sacred in their property than in their liberties, their lives, and every privilege they enjoyed. If they were for a time made quiet, by the discontinuing the exercise of one right, they would not have been wanting, at a convenient time, and they have not been wanting, to avail themselves of the position and principle once established, to the utter subversion of all dependence and controul upon them whatsoever.

This principle, which has cost us thirteen Provinces, together with 100,000,000*l.* in money, almost all our islands, and so many other fatal consequences of the war it has engaged us in, is now come nearer home to us: it has laid us under the necessity of surrendering up to Ireland not an exemption from taxes only, but *all right* of legislation over that kingdom. It short, it has stripped Great-Britain of her dependencies, and left her scarcely any thing of her lately wide-extended empire; or any evidence of her former greatness, except the burthen of our debt, which,
with

with the diminution of our resources, has increased upon us, and is left a load upon us alone and our posterity. Where is the wonder, when we consider that such a principle, pursued from step to step, is incompatible with every subordinate dependence whatsoever, down to the Isle of Guernsey, or the Isle of Man, which must stand in the alternative, of either submitting to laws they have not consented to, or must form their own legislation with a representation of their own, there is no medium? A Government once constituted upon such an acknowledged principle, is absolutely incapable of any acquisition that is not incorporated with it by an act of equal union, like the two united kingdoms of Great-Britain.—Conquests, cession, inheritance, can bring only alliances with so many independent States under one Sovereign, as long as all controul is tyranny, that is not founded upon the actual consent of the people governed. Some few possessions we still have left. The dominions of our trading Company to the East-Indies, from which we have drawn so many resources, and which our acts of Parliament have interfered in with so little scruple, have yet enforced no such claims or pretensions; when they do, I trust, we shall find some new distinctions which may retain them under our subjection. Having thus circumscribed and mutilated our empire, this prevailing

ing principle has now found its way into our own bosom. Having alienated our dependencies, there remains only for it to throw this island itself into confusion and civil war. Whatever you, Sir, or the mover of the late committee, and the sober reformers, may flatter themselves in the purity and moderation of their intentions, you will be no longer masters of the weight you mean to move, when once it gains upon you, and hurries you down the precipice. The theory is *at least* as true in the extreme as in the degree; and when you have once called the attention of the people, and roused their feelings to the principle, it will no longer be a question what *you* think expedient, but what *they* think their right. Read all the various plans that have been proposed upon the reformation of the representative body—is there one, except your own, that does not propose *a new constitution of Parliament*, upon arguments unanswerable in point of theory, and such as appeal to the most obvious maxims of common sense, and those interests which are in unison to the breast of every Englishman: but the people, you say, will not listen to these appeals; they will take contentedly what you chuse to give them.—If they are not then in earnest, if they do not take an active and zealous part in this question which relates to them, and to none but them, let them, in God's name, rest contented with those institu-

tions which have at least the sanction of habit and immemorial usage. If they are capable of entering warmly into the question, and cry aloud, as is pretended, and assert the rights that are held out to them, what argument do you conceive will convince them, that a very few *rotten boroughs* partially suppressed, with an addition of a certain number of Knights of the Shire partially chosen, ought to make them patiently submit to be excluded from what they are told is the distinguishing right of freemen. Remember, they are by far the majority in numbers ; and if they have reasoning enough to comprehend the general principle, without being able to foresee the labyrinth it leads to ; if they have the strength without the wisdom, and the experience to direct it, or property to restrain it, they are precisely in the situation the most formidable when they are incited. Let them once be told, that representation and legislation go together ; that if they *choose* to have a vote for members of Parliament, they have all equally an inherent and indefeasible right to it ; that the exercise of that right should be submitted to them, to be repeated as often as they think proper ; that every man is a slave who submits to laws he has not consented to ; that a member of Parliament is a mere agent to carry their will into execution, even against his own conviction ; can you doubt of their assent to these propositions ?

It

It is said, truly, that nothing is more difficult than to know the real opinion of the people—upon these subjects it would be folly to ask it; we know it before we ask it. All men who are excluded from power are too happy to gain importance by being admitted to it; all men who are fond of power will think the oftener they are allowed to exercise it the better. Appeal therefore to the people! the man who bids highest to their passions and immediate interests will always carry it over the moderate and judicious: your voice will soon be drowned by the clamours of violence, and enthusiasm, and ignorance, and by those who wish to create to themselves an existence from the troubles of the times. It will then be too late to reason or remonstrate, when the passions of the multitude are loose upon us, *and arms put into their hands.*

I am, SIR,

Your most obedient humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

